

**House International Relations Committee
Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia
Hearing on Review of U.S. Assistance Programs to Egypt
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Madame Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify. I had the pleasure of testifying before the full committee in June 2004 on a similar subject. With your permission, I would like to focus primarily on developments in Egypt since that time and recommendations regarding U.S. policy and assistance.

In 2005, Egypt made progress regarding political liberties. At the initiative of President Mubarak, the parliament amended the constitution to allow for direct popular election of the head of state for the first time in the country's history in September. Parliamentary elections were more closely supervised by the judiciary and were more competitive than previous elections—resulting in opposition candidates, most of them Muslim Brothers, winning nearly one third of the seats--albeit marred by violence and intervention by security forces. Among the most important developments was that for the first time civil society organizations trained and deployed thousands of Egyptian citizens to monitor the elections, an effort assisted by the United States and European donors.

Looking at the balance sheet of Egyptian politics in 2005, there were more positive than negative developments overall. Those developments, however, did not put Egypt firmly on a path toward full democracy nor did they demonstrate a clear commitment to such a path on the part of the ruling establishment. Furthermore, there were unfortunate setbacks at the end of 2005 and in 2006: the conviction of Tomorrow Party leader Ayman Nour on forgery charges, the postponement for two years of local elections that were to be held this spring, the renewal for two years of the state of emergency, disciplinary action against two prominent judges, and the use of force to break up demonstrations related to these events.

In addition to these setbacks, there has been a general slowdown in political reform. President Mubarak made important pledges during his presidential campaign in 2005: replacing the state of emergency with a counterterrorism law, passing a new law of the judiciary, and amending the constitution to rebalance powers between the executive and legislative branches. Thus far, no new legislation related to these pledges has been put forward in parliament, which will end its 2006 session in a few weeks. The ruling National Democratic Party is only now beginning informal discussions about these issues, some of which might be translated into legislation in 2007.

As we look into the future, what steps would Egypt take if it were now to become committed to a process of political reform leading toward democracy? There are a number of hallmarks to look for in the realm of law, for example revising the constitution

to introduce presidential term limits and to give the parliament more meaningful budgetary authority, passing a law giving judges greater independence, removing the ruling party's virtual veto over the formation of new parties, and of course lifting the state of emergency in place continuously since 1981. Just as important as changes in law would be changes in long-held practices by the ruling establishment such as using internal security services to monitor and repress non-violent political opponents and constructing legal cases against those who challenge the system publicly.

There are many critical issues that Egyptians would need to work out among themselves during a process of democratization, for example how the system can be opened up to true competition and how Islamists can be incorporated legitimately into the political sphere while ensuring essential stability and the rights of all citizens, including women and non-Muslims. There is little the United States can contribute directly to such decisions, and efforts to do so might well backfire. What the United States can do, however, is use engagement with the Egyptian government and assistance programs to encourage a continual opening of the political space so that the needed debate among Egyptians can take place and decisions can emerge.

Regarding democracy assistance programs, the United States should apply certain principles:

- Keep the main focus on reform issues that Egyptian reform advocates are stressing: independence of the judiciary, lifting the state of emergency, instituting presidential term limits, and redistributing some power from the executive to the legislative branch.
- Begin to develop programs focused on longer term issues that will become important should Egypt move toward democracy, such as building support for civilian control and oversight of the armed forces and for redefining the role of internal security forces as defending the state from violent challenges rather than from non-violent dissidents.
- Expand U.S. flexibility in designing and implementing democracy assistance programs with Egyptian government agreement only to general guidelines.

The foundations of the strong partnership between Egypt and the United States—regional peace, military and counterterrorism cooperation, economic reform—are still valid after nearly 30 years, and in many ways the relationship has strengthened and deepened. Now the issue of democracy has been added to the agenda, partly due to a new perspective in Washington but also because calls for change from within Egypt are being expressed with increasing clarity and strength. While the United States should be realistic about the limitations of its influence in Egypt, it should also make clear that the quality and pace of political reform will be among the key elements determining how the U.S.-Egyptian relationship will develop in the coming years.

Thank you for this opportunity to address the subcommittee. As a supplement to my testimony, I would like to leave a copy of my recent paper, "[Evaluating Egyptian Reform](#)" (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Working Paper 66, January 2006), which contains more detailed analysis and policy recommendations.